

Lavender and Lady's Mantle

by Sandy Brue

Wrapped and tied, corpses lie on a hard board
Stretched between two wooden chairs, waiting till
Dawn when the dark-eyed children
Will gather one last time.

Black curly hair, wet from washing
Sprouts from the small bundle tucked
Beside its mother. Pulled back from the hearth
Thin ice forms on their damp shrouds.

A stone pestle grinds around a marble bowl grooved from use.
Sitting close to the fire, she mixes herbs as shriveled as her face.
Gnarled joints softened with oils gently stir
Adding more chartreuse powder.

Rising stiffly from her straight-backed chair,
She lights another candle against early evening shadows.
One hand sweeps the spills off a yellowed table
The other brushes back stray hair.

The long man appears for his turn and warms his hands by the fire.
Placing her mixture on a shelf in the stillroom, she prepares to go.
Gathering leaves and cloth and fading until
Once again there is a need to lay someone in lavender.